United Nations S/PV.5287

Security Council

Sixtieth year

Provisional

5287th meeting

Thursday, 20 October 2005, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Motoc	(Romania)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Benmehidi
	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	Benin	Mr. Idohou
	Brazil	Mr. Tarrisse da Fontoura
	China	Mr. Cheng Jingye
	Denmark	Mr. Faaborg-Andersen
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Greece	Mrs. Papadopoulou
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Philippines	Mr. Mercado
	Russian Federation	Mr. Denisov
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Thomson
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

05-56090 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Gambari: Over a month has passed since the withdrawal of Israeli settlements and military infrastructure from the Gaza Strip. At the time, we anticipated that the post-disengagement period would hold both hopes and perils. Since then, we have witnessed both.

On the day the Council was last briefed on this item (see S/PV.5270), the level of violence in Gaza escalated when an explosion at a Hamas rally in Jabaliya killed 19 people. Shortly afterwards, Hamas fired rockets into Israel, which responded with air strikes on Gaza and large-scale arrests in the West Bank. Palestinian security forces also clashed with militants.

Those events demonstrate the all too familiar potential for deteriorating security to derail the political process. Scheduled meetings between Prime Minister Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas were twice postponed during the past month.

In short, disengagement has yet to revive the peace process. But we continue to believe that it offers a basis and an opportunity to do exactly that, through completion of the agenda laid out by the Quartet, and by renewed and broader dialogue between the Israeli and Palestinian Governments. The international community stands ready to assist, but the responsibility for seizing this opportunity rests, more than ever before, with the parties.

Let me turn to steps taken since disengagement. The Quartet's Special Envoy, James Wolfensohn, returned to the region on 7 October to push forward the Quartet's agenda in relation to disengagement. Mr. Wolfensohn sought to conclude agreements on the six-plus-three issues relating to movement, security and reform, which have formed the basis of his work since June.

The first of the six joint issues is border crossings and trade corridors. Reopening the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and Gaza is of immediate social and political importance, because it would restore a measure of Palestinian access to the world outside Gaza. It should also pave the way for agreements on border crossings with Israel, a link between Gaza and the West Bank, and the reopening of Gaza's air and sea ports. Since 17 September, the Rafah crossing has been fully open for only five days, pending agreement between the parties on administration of the crossing. According to the Special Envoy, agreement on the crossing regime is close: the parties have reached consensus on the main technical elements of its administration, and on a third-party presence along the border with Egypt. The European Union has offered to consider such a role, although a formal invitation has not yet been issued. We are hopeful, however, that reports that the Rafah crossing will reopen by 15 November are accurate, and we urge the three parties to continue to cooperate on this crucial issue.

The flow of people and goods between Israel and Gaza and between Israel and the West Bank must also be improved. It is the judgement of the Special Envoy that the parties are close to agreement on a management system for those borders, but Israel has, since 5 September, declined to meet with the Palestinian Authority in order to take the negotiations forward. Nor are proposals for a corridor to link the West Bank and Gaza being discussed by the parties. The United States and the World Bank have launched an options review to compare the costs of a road link and those of a railway, but Israel has demanded that work on that study cease.

Meanwhile, the Quartet is implementing a major programme of assistance aimed at creating jobs and at boosting Palestinian recovery in the aftermath of disengagement. On 5 October, the European Commission announced a proposal to increase European Union assistance to Palestinians by approximately €250 million. That offer is, however, conditional on an improvement in the security and movement situation. Other donors have also provided additional assistance, and according to an early estimate, overall disbursements this year will reach $1.1 billion to $1.3 billion, a 25 to 35 per cent increase over the annual average of the past four years. At least 35 per cent of this international assistance to the Palestinians will be channelled through United Nations agencies.

Palestinian recovery will not be sustainable until restrictions on the movement of goods and people are lifted and until the Palestinian Authority is able to establish firm administrative control. We note with concern the Special Envoy's recent reports on a number of weaknesses in the Palestinian Authority's internal structures and on its growing fiscal crisis. We also share the Special Envoy's disappointment that none of the movement issues was resolved this month — especially given the progress that the parties have made on the technical aspects of the Gaza border regimes. We hope for substantive progress during the coming weeks.

I would now like to turn to bilateral talks between the parties and domestic political issues. We have, for some time, been entertaining the hope that disengagement would contribute to the promotion of greater confidence between the parties, leading to dialogue on a broader range of issues. The process undoubtedly increased cooperation between the parties at the working level. The leaders also seem closer to resuming bilateral negotiations. A meeting between the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President Mahmoud Abbas was scheduled for 2 October; that was to have been their first such meeting since June. The meeting was, however, postponed twice and has now been rescheduled for November.

It is clear that the increase in violence played a role in derailing the plans for such bilateral talks between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders and also made their domestic positions even more difficult. Prime Minister Sharon carried out disengagement in the face of vocal domestic pressure; that pressure revived following the 24 September rocket attacks on Sderot. On the Palestinian side, on 3 October the Palestinian Legislative Council called on the President to dissolve the Government and to form another within two weeks. That call was precipitated by heavy armed clashes in Gaza between Palestinian police and militants. Such pressures make it more difficult for both leaders to take further steps towards peace.

With regard to security and violence, I would like to report that the security situation deteriorated significantly during the last week of September and the first week of October. Both Israeli and Palestinian civilians were badly affected by the upsurge in violence during those weeks. Indeed, the events of this month highlight once again the need for greater restraint to be shown in order to protect civilians and to create conditions under which the political process can move forward.

On 23 September, a large explosion at a Hamas rally in the Jabaliya refugee camp killed 19 people and injured 130. According to the Palestinian Authority and most observers, Hamas's mishandling of explosives at the rally was responsible for the explosion. Hamas, however, blamed Israel and fired 30 rockets into the Israeli town of Sderot on the following day, wounding five Israelis.

Israel responded to that attack by sealing the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and it launched air strikes against targets in Gaza during the next four days. Israeli F-16 fighter jets repeatedly flew low over the Gaza Strip. The consequent sonic booms caused widespread fear among the population, and medical officials in Gaza reported negative effects on children and pregnant women. In the West Bank, the Israeli military killed three suspected militants on 29 September and arrested hundreds of others. That series of arrests constituted Israel's largest since Operation Defensive Shield in 2002.

The Palestinian security services also responded to the upsurge in militant violence, clashing with militants in Gaza and confiscating explosives and Qassam rockets. The Palestinian Authority reported that Palestinian security services had prevented 17 terrorist attacks against Israel since disengagement. The attempt to control militants has tested Palestinian law-enforcement capabilities. On 2 October, a Palestinian police commander and two civilians were killed in clashes with Hamas militants, and more than

40 people, including many children, were injured. On the following day, Palestinian police broke into the compound of the Legislative Council, firing into the air in protest at their inability to deal with militant attacks.

The security situation improved somewhat during the second week of October, but on 16 October, militants from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade shot dead three Israelis as they travelled to settlements in the West Bank. Israel responded by imposing tight restrictions on Palestinian movement in the West Bank.

The United States Security Coordinator, General William Ward, and his team continue with their important work to push forward security sector reform. The Palestinian leadership has announced a decision to confiscate illegally held weapons and has nominated three officials who will bear overall responsibility for security sector reform. Such steps could contribute significantly to the control of internal violence and to progress towards the fulfilment of Palestinian road map commitments related to security. Further progress in this area is absolutely critical during the coming weeks and months.

Furthermore, regarding movement and closures, the movement of people and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip has been restricted more heavily than it was during the months preceding disengagement. The number of workers crossing into Israel via Erez dropped dramatically. In addition to closures at Rafah and Erez, the Karni goods transit terminal was closed for several days, causing a reduction in both exports from and imports into Gaza and leading to shortages of foodstuffs such as milk.

We cannot yet attribute that increase in movement restrictions entirely to the post-disengagement situation, because it conforms to a pattern of closures imposed by Israel during the Jewish holidays in previous years. In previous years, long periods of closure have also had a serious impact on incomes and the economy in Gaza. The effects of movement restrictions are particularly worrying in this very fragile post-disengagement period.

As reported in previous briefings, Israel has reduced the number of checkpoints and closure measures in the West Bank during the course of 2005. But closure measures were again increased after three Israelis were shot and killed on 16 October.

The concerns about settlement construction and the barrier that were recently reiterated by the Quartet do not appear to have been heeded. Israel continues to construct the barrier in the Jerusalem area. Settlements and the restrictions that surround them and the barrier continue to impede Palestinian movements within the West Bank. Movement restrictions created by the barrier, by the checkpoints, by the border closures and by poor internal security continue to impede the ability of United Nations agencies and programmes to provide assistance to Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank.

Let me say a word about elections. I would like to mention that the Palestinians held a third round of municipal elections in the West Bank on 29 September. Elections in Gaza were postponed due to security concerns. Participation in the poll was high and Fatah won over 53 per cent of seats in municipal councils, compared to 26 per cent won by Hamas. Technical preparations are under way for forthcoming Palestinian legislative elections, which are scheduled for 25 January 2006.

There have been a number of important developments in Lebanon. As members are aware, there was yet another attempted assassination, this time targeting May Chidiac, a prominent Lebanese journalist and political talk show host. The incident took place on 25 September in the town of Jounieh, north of Beirut, and involved a bomb placed under her car. Fortunately, Ms. Chidiac survived the attempt on her life, although she was seriously injured. The Secretary-General reiterated the United Nations condemnation of such acts of terror, aimed at intimidation and destabilization, and expressed his sympathies to Ms. Chidiac and her family. The Secretary-General again emphasized the need to bring to justice the perpetrators of that and other recent terrorist actions in Lebanon.

I am pleased to report that the situation along the Blue Line in southern Lebanon has remained calm. However, I regret to note again the continued Israeli air violations of the Blue Line and Lebanese airspace. Since the last briefing of the Council, a total of 11 air violations, involving 19 aircraft, have been recorded.

That is all I am going to say about Lebanon. I am sure that some will be disappointed, because of course they would like to hear about the Mehlis report. That is

reserved for when Mr. Mehlis briefs the Council himself in both private and public meetings.

I wish to make a few observations. A month ago, Israel's disengagement from Gaza and the Palestinians' success in restraining violence during the disengagement period contributed to a sense of optimism in the Middle East. Israel, Egypt and the Palestinians seemed close to agreeing measures that would enable the population of Gaza to travel and trade more easily. Prime Minister Sharon and President Abbas were planning to meet for the first time since June. Other developments pointed to a thaw in the attitudes of some Arab and Islamic countries towards Israel. An upsurge in violence, however, has undermined those positive political developments and dulled the sense of optimism. The postponement of proposed meetings between President Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon was particularly disappointing, since a return to bilateral negotiations would have marked an important turning point in the efforts to end the conflict.

Israeli and Palestinian leaders are now planning to resume talks in November. In our view, such meetings should take place periodically, and we hope that the leaders will have the tenacity and the courage to continue with negotiations over the coming months, even if further security crises occur. The political track has to be resilient to the inevitable ups and downs of this unstable post-disengagement period.

The international community, meanwhile, will continue to play its part in consolidating the success of disengagement. Quartet envoy James Wolfensohn will continue his efforts to push the parties towards agreement on the key "six plus three" issues. The donors are also pulling their weight to build on the positive momentum created by disengagement.

The Quartet will continue, as it has for the past three years, to work to achieve the vision of a just, lasting and comprehensive regional peace based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). We welcome today's meeting between President Bush and President Abbas in Washington, D.C. However, the international community can only assist in restarting the peace process; it cannot lead a return to negotiations unless both parties take bold steps to fulfil their respective commitments. The parties must work constructively over the coming month to clear up the outstanding access and movement issues relating to disengagement, acting in parallel to implement obligations set out in the road map.

One of Israel's primary obligations under the road map is to halt all settlement activity, including natural growth, and dismantle outposts erected since March 2001. The cessation of settlement activity is an important confidence-building measure; while Israel continues to construct settlements in the West Bank, it is hard for President Abbas to convince Palestinians that peaceful negotiations with Israel will lead to the creation of a viable Palestinian State. The same must be said of Israel's construction of the barrier on Palestinian land.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority must persist with comprehensive reform and with the strengthening of its security services with the aim of ending violence and terror, as stipulated in the road map. The events of the past month have highlighted how Palestinian internal security problems have the potential to derail the political process and the peace process. There is evidence that Palestinians strongly support President Abbas' efforts to rein in militant groups. The Palestinian leadership now needs to build on that support and demonstrate its ability to improve Palestinian law enforcement capabilities.

Finally, I would like to say that the withdrawal of Israeli settlers and military infrastructure has lifted a burden from the people of Gaza. It also has the potential to create new opportunities for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Further energetic coordination, cooperation and engagement by Israelis, by the Palestinians and by the international community are needed in order to translate successful disengagement into a negotiated and sustainable peace.

The President: I thank Mr. Gambari for his comprehensive briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.